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C O N F I D E N T I A L VATICAN 000554

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR EUR/WE LARREA; WHA/CCA

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SUBJECT: CUBA: VATICAN SEES NO CHANGE IN DIRECTION

REF: HAVANA 24599

CLASSIFIED BY: Peter Martin, Pol/Econ Chief, Vatican, State.

REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

1. (C) Holy See Country Director for Cuba Monsignor Nicolas Thevenin told us recently he did not think Castro's recent meeting with Cardinal Ortega and the Cuban bishops (reftel) was a sign of any change in direction or major new initiative for the dictator. Thevenin, who recently returned to the Vatican after a tour in Havana, found the fact that the meeting had taken place interesting and agreed with reftel that Castro may well have been using the visit for any number of purposes. He said, however, that he would not read much more into it. Thevenin had not yet received a report on the meeting from the Papal Nuncio.

2. (C) Thevenin noted that Castro is adept at using visits and meetings such as this to press his agenda. For this reason Thevenin had warned his home bishop, Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone of Genova, before his October visit to Cuba to be wary of being used by Castro. Speaking with us Thevenin did not criticize Bertone or judge the trip to have been a failure, but we note that in the end, Vatican-based media reported widely on the visit. In one account, Catholic News Service quoted Castro complimenting Pope Benedict and the late Pope John Paul II, and then quoted Bertone praising Castro's "nice recognition of the church's work." Bertone added that Castro "has not failed to give a good example, by offering or sending aid" to countries (including the U.S.) ravaged by natural disasters.

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